

**Testimony of Mr. Henkie Rumbewas  
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**before the  
U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment**

**September 22, 2010**

**“Crimes Against Humanity: When Will Indonesia’s Military Be Held  
Accountable for Deliberate and Systematic Abuses in West Papua?”**

Allow me to extend the greetings and gratitude from the People of West Papua.

“Koya, “Jow Suba, and “Achemo” from the People of West Papua to you, Chairman Eni Faleomavaega, to you Chairman Donald Payne, and to all members of the US Congress who have supported West Papuans.

We owe particular gratitude to the 50 Members of Congress who signed the recent letter about West Papua to the President of the United States: Mr Barrack Obama.

I was born on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1956 on the Island of Biak, West Papua. I was only seven years old when the Indonesian military invaded West Papua in 1962. My father was a health worker at the local hospital during the Dutch administration. In the middle of the night since October 1963, my father was taken by the Arm Forces and sent to prison with many other West Papuans on the island of Biak. This was the first nightmare I experienced—living without a father from 1963 until 1970. My father was sent to jail simply because he made public statements rejecting Indonesian military rule in West Papua. In 1970, a year after the Free Act of “No Choice,” my father was released. The story of my father is only one example of many other West Papuans who were imprisoned in the past. Even today, there are still many more political prisoners in West Papua.

In 1967, my uncle Permenas Awom began leading an armed struggle against the Indonesian military rule in Manokwari. Permenas was later persuaded by the Suharto’s government to surrender peacefully. But he later disappeared without any trace while in custody of the Indonesian Armed Forces.

In 1969, Nataniel Awom, the younger brother of Permenas, was leading an armed struggle against Indonesian military rule in the island of Biak. He was also persuaded and surrendered peacefully. Towards the Christmas of 1969, he also disappeared in the hands of Indonesian arm forces without any trace. The two uncles mentioned above are just the examples many other West Papuans in other areas who lost their lives during Indonesian military operations in the early 1960’s.

Between 1964 and 1967, a cousin and a close friend of mine, Arnold Ap, formed a Papuan cultural music group known as Mambesak. Arnold Ap was basically promoting Papuan folk songs and collecting Papuan artifacts. Arnold later studied anthropology and taught at Cenderawasih University in West Papua's capitol of Jayapura. Arnold Ap was simply trying to promote the indigenous culture of Melanesian people. The military government saw that Arnold Ap was promoting the Papuan culture and that it was popular among the West Papuan people. Therefore, in April 1983, Arnold was murdered along with his cousin Eduard Mofu and two other West Papuans in his cultural group. Their bodies were badly tortured, burnt, and thrown at the beach near the town of Jayapura. The military perpetrators of this crime were promoted following this murder.

After the murder of Arnold Ap, I decided to become an advocate for his case and other human rights abuses in West Papua on an international scale. In 1984, the Catholic church of Australia sponsored me to live in exile in Australia. Since then, I have adopted Australia as my new home. Many other West Papuans have fled West Papua for their safety to the neighboring country of Papua New Guinea, Australia, and the Netherlands. There are thousands of West Papuan refugees inside the independent state of Papua New Guinea today. The Indonesian government from time to time has tried to persuade the Papua New Guinea government to repatriate many of these refugees back to West Papua.

The future of the West Papuan refugees is always uncertain. Many of them are stateless and not recognized under the UN International convention on refugees. Some government officials in Papua New Guinea regard them simply as "Border-Crossers."

The Indonesian government has been opening up new lands in West Papua just to shelter new settlers from the over crowded islands of Java and other parts of Indonesia. We, the West Papuans, are becoming minorities in our own homeland. In the 1971 census there were 887,000 indigenous West Papuans ('Irian born') out of a total population of 923,000 – or 96%.<sup>1</sup> The 2010 census figures so far released only give a total population figure without breaking that figure down into respective ethnic groups. An analysis of these data, just published last week by Dr. James Elmslie, suggests that we are now only 49.55% of population in our homeland.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Chairman, I do sincerely hope that our testimony before you today would not be just a showcase to entertain us as indigenous people of West Papua, but a firm action should be taken by the Congress of the United States of America and the government of the United States of America to end support for the Indonesian military. In this context Mr. Chairman, allow me to extend our gratitude to you for sponsoring H.Res. 1355. We hope this Resolution, about free speech and political prisoners, will pass through the US Congress.

At the moment, the people of West Papua are demanding a referendum on the issue of independence in West Papua. Mr. Chairman, Indonesian officials are frustrating our attempts to hold a genuine political dialog about our future. A democratic vote on the issue of independence is now the only means to defend our rights and existence as a race of people in our own God given land.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Elmslie, J. (2009). "Not Just Another Disaster: Papuan Claims of Genocide Deserve to be Taken Seriously." Inside Indonesia 97.

<sup>2</sup> These figures from the 2010 assume that the historical West Papuan annual growth rate has been maintained over the course of the last decade at 10.82%. Elmslie, J. (2010). West Papuan Demographic Transition and the 2010 Indonesian Census: "Slow Motion Genocide" or not?" Papua Papers no. 1, A report prepared for the West Papua Project at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, The University of Sydney, NSW, Australia, September, 2010. ISBN 978-0-9808286-3-4.